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Stony Run Press

by the same author

100 poems
collected poems
the grace at the heart of the world
homecomings
starvation ridge
toward a buddhist/permaculture ethic
viewing jasper mountain
what to do about trees

available from

In place: 1. working or ready to work; established. 2. [North American] not traveling any distance. One thinks of Thoreau (Walden): "I have traveled a great deal in Concord." To "shelter in place" is to ride out an emergency, disaster or apocalypse in one's place of residence or wherever one happens to be. Here it is suggested that the study of reality may be carried on just as one finds oneself, be it home, monastery, hermitage, hotel, freeway, or jail cell.

Not hindering others is not hindering self.

— Dogen (tr. Tanahashi)

Preface

The author is a part-time hermit, part-time householder; that is, the hut is by her back fence and she's not at the hut all the time. She is, by the way, not a Buddhist teacher; this is merely a report of a sojourn.

The hut, called Gogo-an after the hut where Ryokan wrote poetry, currently contains

(deep breath)

a broom, cot, two blankets, two pillows, four chairs, electric desk lamp, desk, altar, censer, Buddha statue, vase, several clay offering bowls, candles, incense, lighter, cleaning rags, ointment, toothbrush, hairbrush, soap, ointment, two steel bowls, two soup/tea mugs, tumbler, two spoons, two forks, two pairs of chopsticks, a knife, steamer, coffeemaker, several Mason jars of dried tea, beans and grains, salt shaker with salt, water bottle, hammer, pair of pliers, assortment of hardware, pair of scissors, sewing kit, about twenty books, a transistor radio, Guanyin statue, a copy of a Soto Buddhist order of service, four chairs, framed enso, framed image of a statue of Mugai Nyodai, trunk with several changes of clothes and a pair of slippers, oil-filled heater, kerosene lamp, four bamboo window shades, work gloves, a gardening apron, secateurs, camp saw, ceremonial rakusu (for a Zen layperson) in its envelope, mala necklace and bracelet, lineage documents, pennywhistle,

magnifying glass, flashlight, thermometer, and a horihori or Japanese gardening knife. Outside usually reside a bucket, hoe, sickle, and watering can. This list could easily be shorter but we're not trying for martyrdom here.

in place

to "practice" in place is the best way to "shelter" in place

Decades ago, a playhouse for her children but too much window glass for their play by the fence it stands now, forlorn, lost; neighbors' horses seem amused This image was probably taken about 2010, when the playhouse had been mostly unused for almost two decades. The shade tree, a Douglas fir, is already looking a little stressed, perhaps partly because the playhouse was built so near it when it was a sapling.

I move my table to read sutras by moonlight I pick wildflowers to fill my altar vase
-- Shiwu (Stonehouse, tr. Red Pine)



Retired from public life, she moves in, old eight books she's written here not bad books, yet she must admit she has failed to save the world

"Failing to save the world" in this instance means having attempted, without much impact, to promote to society at large an agrarian subsistence lifestyle as a response to resource depletion and climate change. Those who speak for corporations proved to have the louder voice, and like many others the old woman has been worn down considerably. She is trying a new approach.

To words and deeds that agree But oceans of greed never fill up and sprouts of delusion keep growing

—Shiwu (Stonehouse) (after Red Pine, tr.)



Thoughts pursued, thoughts of thoughts pursued, writer's cramp alternating with writer's block one old mouse chases her tail While writing these books the retired woman began to see the limits of her own vision and to consider how she might, if not actually "escape the circle of discourse," at least resolve some doubts.

All your opinions are still not put to rest. Your mind is still hindered by attachments. Thus, you are as one sitting outside the gate.

-- Keizan, "Instructions on How to Do Pure Meditation" (tr. Nearman)



An impromptu kitchen appears rice with powdered vegetable leaves sips tea while watching rain slant into cottonwoods

The old woman cut down and firewooded five cottonwood trees here in 2009 because hawks were using them to rest in while counting chickens. Some thirty young trees sprouted from the stumps and roots, and are now the "woodland" associated with the hut. Their trembling leaves are wonderful teachers. The steamer handles rice, barley, oats, potatoes and leafy vegetables with ease, providing a measure of day-to-day independence from the homestead, which is a couple of hundred feet away.

Though the hut is small, it includes the entire world. -- Shitou (tr. Leighton and Tanahashi)

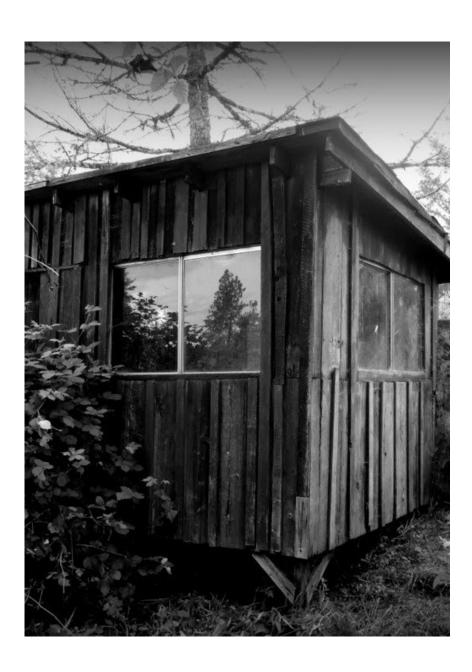


She has cleaned up this site; weeping, she finds toys her children had mislaid among thorns and stones, moss-covered now

Here in 2013 the impending demise of the fir tree has become quite evident. It had shaded the hut as a playhouse and a writer's cabin, as well as numerous picnics. From this eastern window one can hear a small waterfall in winter, towhees in summer. In the 1990s, children played round this structure and inevitably lost or threw away some

toys; plastic lasts a long time but moss will nevertheless cover it after enough winters of rain.

...retiring to my hut I accept white hair but sigh that today and the years gone by are mindless like the rivers flowing east -- Han Shan (Cold Mountain, tr. Red Pine)



She's thrown a heavy old fir beam from bank to bank, replacing a bridge long gone, and cut new trail right through old undergrowth: back door

An intimidating thicket of Himalaya berry canes of course grew up beneath the cottonwoods along the dry wash (a respectable creek in rainy season) but with time and a pair of secateurs such things can be pushed back, if a path is wanted.

If you don't understand the way right before you, how will you know the path as you walk?
-- Shitou (tr. Soto-Shu Liturgy Conference)



Snips rusty fence wire to set a gate; a tiny parkland in deep brush -- this dry wash silent in summer; winter, roaring

The gate provides an entryway from the poultry pasture, allowing access to the hut should anything happen to the main bridge, which crosses the creek elsewhere, nearer the homestead. Three bridges have

been washed away by floods in times past. It is a very dynamic landscape.

Though the river's current never fails, the water passing, moment by moment, is never the same. Where the current pools, bubbles form on the surface, bursting and disappearing as others rise to replace them, none lasting long. In this world, people and their dwelling places are like that, always changing. -- Chomei, Hojoki



Shade tree, dying, leans on hut; old woman, sad, makes cuts then cables tree uphill to make firewood she had not needed

The tree began an imperceptibly slow but undeniable lean to the east, downhill, a path that would take it through the hut. Two feet thick and fifty feet tall, it presented a problem for the author. She considered whether to give up the hut, then elected to draw the tree uphill with wire rope and pulleys. Cutting the tree while it was under pressure from the cable presented its own set of difficulties, as the tree could split and crash backward into the building. By cutting most of the way through the stump and then cranking and resetting the tension many times, she eventually brought the tree within reach of a pole saw.

Daylight where shade had been -- she'd foolishly counted on that shade for the hot summers.

Across the valley
I hear the sounds of trees being felled
-- Ryokan (tr. Abé and Haskel)



She lays carpeting; an old brass bowl will teach by singing— it tells her she may stop thinking, or may even stop stopping thinking.

In 2013 she experienced a crisis of gloom over perceived diminishing likelihood that most species, including humankind, could survive exponential increase of environmental degradation. A friend advised her to take up some form of meditation. She joined a Soto Zen Buddhist sangha. The hut was now repurposed as a zendo (meditation hall) of sorts. "Stop thinking, or even stop stopping thinking" is a reference to Eihei Dogen's "Fukanzazengi."

Think of not thinking, 'Not thinking —what kind of thinking is that?' Nonthinking. This is the essential art of zazen.
— Dogen (tr. Tanahashi)



Books, lamp, her mother's desk, a small cot from which, lying down, she may observe trilling leaves of spring and fall cottonwoods

Currently, most of the books are studies of women in Buddhism and some books by Eihei Dogen, Hongzhi, Shunryu Suzuki, Kosho Uchiyama, Ryokan, Red Pine, Shiwu (Stonehouse) and Han Shan (Cold

Mountain), along with several collections of Chinese poetry translated by Kenneth Rexroth. The collection changes as the old woman's studies change. From the cot there is an especially intriguing view of young cottonwood and ash trees just across the small creek.

In my hut, I listen to the evening rain and stretch my legs without a care in the world.
-- Ryokan (tr. Abé and Haskel)



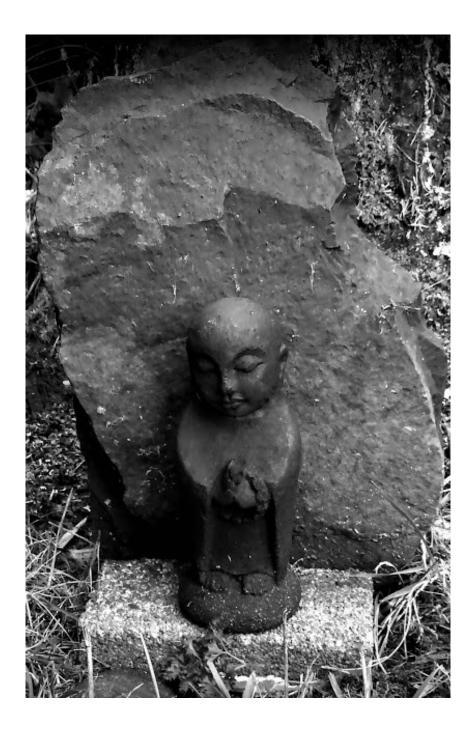
By her door she sets a young friend, monkish, said to represent one who vowed to watch over mad old wet hens and others

This is *Kshitigarbha*, called in Japanese *Jizo*. He is said to take an interest in those who obviously need watching over, such as old fools. Does he? Maybe so:

...ontologically everything is interdependent and empty of independent existence. Dōgen pushes this logic to assert that "All beings are Buddhanature." This deliberate reconfiguration of the Nirvana Sūtra teaching that "All sentient beings have Buddha-nature" highlights Dōgen's more thoroughgoing nondualistic understanding, for Dōgen's articulation does not distinguish between sentient and nonsentient beings nor does it allow for some beings to have Buddha-nature and others not. Buddha-nature is not an object one can

have, in the same way one cannot have a dog or a self, for everything is empty of independent existence.

Paula Arai, "The Zen of Rags" -- in which she muses on cleaning rags as $\operatorname{\mathsf{Buddhas}}$...



A friend donates chairs; with these, two to four may sit thinking no thoughts or thinking of thinking no thoughts while gazing at knotty fir

Four folding chairs came with someone's spare card table. It's encouraging how many useful things one can tuck into an eight by ten shed and not feel that it is cluttered.

The first thing is to learn how to quiet the mind, relax the mind, and bring the awareness to the front so that we are conscious of what we're doing when we're doing it without all the commentary.

-- Tenzin Palmo



The old woman finds a bench difficult, more so every day; one last sit before she gives it up —tap bell, groan, rise — lotus, half lotus? Ha!

When she first began sitting at the hut, use of the seiza or kneeling bench was easy for the old woman; but it became increasingly painful

for her; here we see it being used for the last time and it has since been replaced by a chair. All things come to an end, as will the use of the hut, as will this old woman's life. The book on the floor is an edition of some of Ryokan's poetry.

Falling blossoms.

Blossoms in bloom are also falling blossoms.

— Ryokan (tr. Tanahashi)

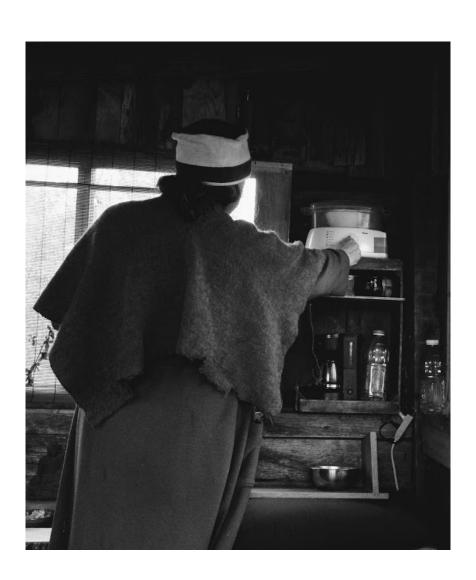


Half householder still, she lives here part time, and so makes tea and rice as needed, washing dishes outdoors. beneath the altar: pantry

In use for more than a decade, her old steamer can cook many things, but is most in demand for rice (pre-seasoned with home-grown dried herbs, kept in a Mason jar underneath the altar) and vegetables (mostly beets, potatoes, kale, chard and zucchini, in season). The little coffeemaker is used to make what the old woman calls "yard" tea — seasonally available forage such as (deep breath) chicory, dandelions, nipplewort, narrow leaf plantain, crimson clover, deadnettle, cat's ears, blackberry leaves, fir or spruce needles, money plant, Bigleaf maple flowers, and crop foliage such as kale, chard, beet greens, squash blossoms and leaves, pea and bean foliage, corn silk, and the like. There are two bowls that also serve as cups, a few utensils, a knife, and a cutting board. Water is brought from the homestead well in a half gallon bottle.

Do not arouse disdainful mind when you prepare a broth of wild grasses; do not arouse joyful mind when you prepare a fine cream soup. Where there is no discrimination, how can there be distaste?

— Dogen (tr. Tanahashi)



Rain comes, fogs settle in; her ceiling does drip a little; path grows muddy; to keep her footing she throws flat stones in low spots

In summer she gathers stones — basalt, mostly — from the dry creek bed and stores them for winter projects.

I always wanted to go to East Cliff, more years than I can remember, until today I just grabbed a vine and started up. Halfway up wind and a heavy mist closed in, and the narrow path tugged at my shirt: it was hard to get on. The slickery mud under the moss on the rocks gave way, and I couldn't keep going. So here I stay, under this cinnamon tree, white clouds for my pillow,I'll just take a nap.— Han Shan (Cold Mountain, tr. Seaton)



Preparing for a lack of shade, the old woman dabs white paint at the roof and rough-sawn walls old wire fence makes an enclosure

Good paint is available at low prices (in five gallon cans) from the local recycler. The old woman has welded-wire fencing and tee posts left over from decades of farm projects. To build a little compound for the hut and its "raised" beds, she wraps fencing around a corner of the pasture. She gives the wire fencing a "rustic" look by inserting hazel prunings in the fencing vertically to a height above six feet. This is more practical than it looks, as it reduces the likelihood of the vegetables being grazed by deer. They are lovely to watch, but perhaps less so when partaking of one's kale.

Sitting, I meditate on emptiness as fresh breezes fill the temple. Words are inherently empty and yet still I am fond of brush and ink.

My mind like ashes after the fire and yet still I am tied to the world.

-- Miaohui (Grant, Daughters of Emptiness 121)



The old woman has found a young friend, molded from ashes gathered from the slopes of a volcano; he points to the earth: witness

This Buddha statue is of the historic Shakyamuni (Gautama Buddha) and recalls the occasion of his great enlightenment. Pressed by Mara, the king of the delusion demons, to prove his enlightenment, he points to the earth and calls it to witness. Acquired from a merchant somewhere, somewhen, she found his rough vagueness of appearance answered to her own vagueness of aspiration and effort, while his uncompromising posture and gesture provided her with a "way in."

Q: What is the Way and how must it be followed?

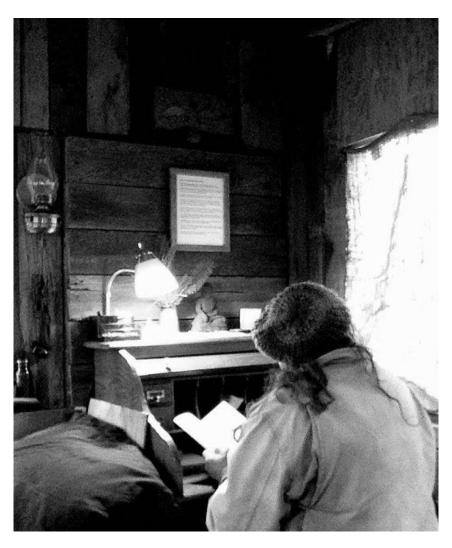
A: What sort of THING do you suppose the Way to be, that you should wish to FOLLOW it?

-- Zen Teaching of Huang-Po 52 (tr. Blofeld)



For study of old books, soft light of rainy days is good; the volcanic young man helps her with her homework The hut is not off-grid; this is thanks to a long heavy-duty drop cord. The old woman has her steamer, tea maker, small heater, and a lamp. Much of her study consists in seeking out connections between talk of "enlightenment" and talk of the "precepts." For years her question has been: what does understanding reality necessarily have to do with compassion?

Buddhas don't keep precepts. And buddhas don't break precepts. -- attr. Bodhidharma (tr. Red Pine)



Through her south window she may watch the neighbors' herd of bison; they gaze in as well she counts them friends The bison, she's told, are really "beefalo." They are very impressive. The obvious equality of these beings with the old woman might be a clue to her question.

If you are not caught up in the rules and ranks, there is no seeking. -- Chao-Chou in Loori, *The Heart of Being* 51-52.

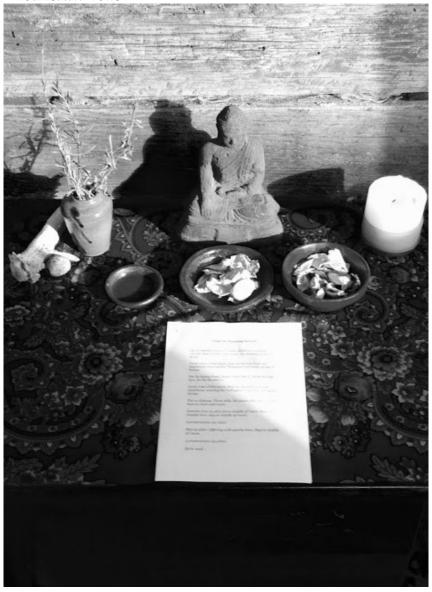


Mornings she repeats ancient texts abjuring illusion, anger, fear; speaks the names of friends and others, ill or passed

Morning service at "Gogo-an" consists of Robe Chant, zazen, Heart Sutra, nine bows, Dedications (reading of the current Memorial List, reading of the current Well-Being List), Bodhisattva Vows, Refuges, six days a week. One can see from all the capitalization that there is certainly some risk of pietism, which she guards against warily. Heart Sutra is supposed to be chanted, but she's not good at this and just reads it aloud.

Beings are numberless; I vow to free them.

Delusions are inexhaustible; I vow to end them. Dharma gates are boundless; I vow to enter them.
Buddha's way is unsurpassable; I vow to attain it.
-- Bodhisattva Vows



The carpet comes in handy for nine bows; with hands uplifted, the old woman pauses, thoughtlessly thoughtful of all

These bows are supposed to be prostrations from standing, but the old woman's back and legs are beginning to fail her, so she now uses the

railing of the cot as a grab bar to get to her knees and does her bows from there. This is sometimes accompanied by the grunts and groans of the elderly.

...we should know why we do prostrations. We do not do them to endear ourselves to somebody else. We do not do them for the Buddha. Such concepts are completely wrong. The Buddha is not a god of this world. We bow down to purify all situations from the past where we did not respect others.

-- Lama Gendyn Rinpoche



A quiet fellow waits out morning service, anxious for his daily walk along green country ways, reading sign

Shown here at age seventeen, this cairn terrier is mostly blind and deaf, but can find warm sunny spots and lives by scent. The old woman thinks of their walks as a kind of *kinhin*, or walking meditation.

On either side of the footpath rises a row of green pines.

Over the valley, the scent of a wild plum is wafted to me. Each visit to this place yields me a fresh spiritual gain.
-- Ryokan (tr. Nobuyuki Yuasa, The Zen Poems of Ryokan 57)



Spring advances, sun returns; grey skies give way to flocks of round clouds; worms, birds and mice are busy

A mother mouse tunneled into the old woman's mattress to give birth. Mrs. Mouse and her brood died one spring day as the old woman lay

down for a nap. The old woman mourned more than she would have expected.

Were it not for the suffering of sentient beings, no need for compassion would arise.

-- John Daido Loori in *The True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Three Hundred Koans* xxxii)



Ritual averse, yet she has such: brewing tea of blackberry leaves, chard, kale, squash leaves, maple blooms; pour, settle, sip, sit

The Way does not have any particular form that can be cultivated, the Dharma does not have any particular form that can be validated. Just unrestricted norecollection and no-thought, at all times everything is the Way.

— Wuzhu, Lidai fabao ji in *The Teachings of Master Wuzhu* 141 (Adamek)



Through the bamboo screen, watch leaves fall in autumn, branches rattle in winter, foliage tremble in spring, droop in summer

This is part of her tea "ritual" in all seasons.

In the spring, cherry blossoms.

In the summer the cuckoo. In autumn the moon. In winter the snow, clear, cold.

— Dogen (after Tanahashi)



Dark of the year, her altar lacks flowers: a moss covered oak branch makes do; in spring she finds a spray of quince

Flowering quince goes well with the red altar cloth and bowls, so she enjoys the three weeks or so that the blossoms may be available. Still, every offering is quite right.

One day Daowu and Yunyan were out walking with Yaoshan, who pointed at two trees with his finger. One was healthy and the other was withered up. He asked Daowu, "Which is better, the withered tree or the healthy tree?" Daowu

answered, "The healthy one is better." Yaoshan said, "So everything around it becomes bright and colorful." Then he asked Yunyan the same question. Yunyan said, "The withered tree is better." Yaoshan said, "So everything around it looks gray and withered up." An attendant named Gao appeared suddenly. Yaoshan asked him the same question. Gao said, "The withered one is withered and the healthy one is healthy." Yaoshan turned to Daowu and Yunyan and said, "You were both wrong."

-- Soto Zen Ancestors in China, James Mitchell, 62



Winds from the river by day winds from mountains at night sing to cottonwood leaves: cottonwood leaves sing back

Though the old woman has a cot in the hut and naps there often, she has seldom slept in it overnight. But she does lie long abed in the afternoons, attending the rustling leaves.

The dharma does not rise up alone—it can't emerge without reliance on the world. If I take up the challenge of speaking I must surely borrow the light and the dark, the form and the emptiness of the mountains and hills and the great earth, the call of the magpies and the cries of the crows. The water flows and the

flowers blossom, brilliantly preaching without ceasing. In this way there is no restraint.

— Ziyong Chengru in *The Hidden Lamp: Stories from Twenty-Five Centuries of Awakened Women*, Caplow and Moon, 241



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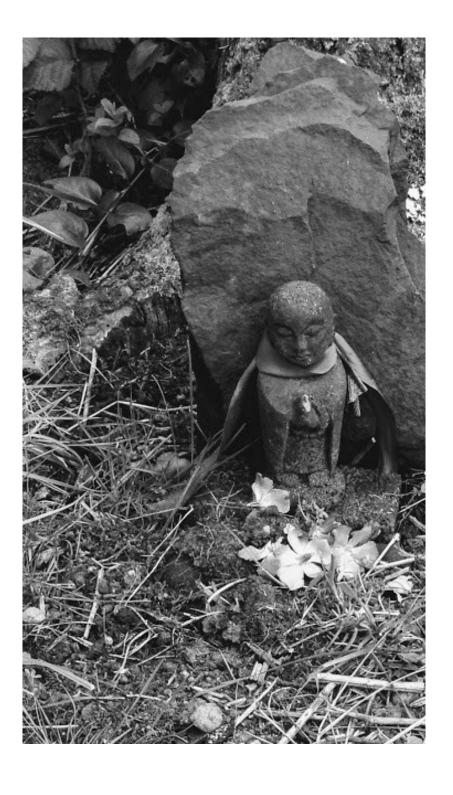
The young-old monk, watcher over infants and mad crones, gets a late spring offering — handful of vinca blossoms

Jizo once greeted visitors to the homestead, but lost his head more than once as water hoses were hauled around the garden. In his new location at the hut he is a hermit, but has never left off his practice. The stone behind him was raised from the dry creek bed the preceding summer.

 $Firmly\ based\ on\ steadiness,\ it\ can't\ be\ surpassed.$

A shining window below the green pines -- jade palaces or vermilion towers can't compare with it.

-- Shitou, "Song of the Grass-Roof Hut" in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (1924-33) reprinted in Hongzhi, *Cultivating the Empty Field*, 2000, tr. Leighton and Yi Wu



From the end of this pasture she looks back: if there were suddenly no hut, there would still be grass, trees, stones and stream

Everything here is exactly as it is.

The body and mind of the Buddha way is grass, trees, tiles and pebbles, as well as wind, rain, water and fire.

— Dogen (tr. Tanahashi)



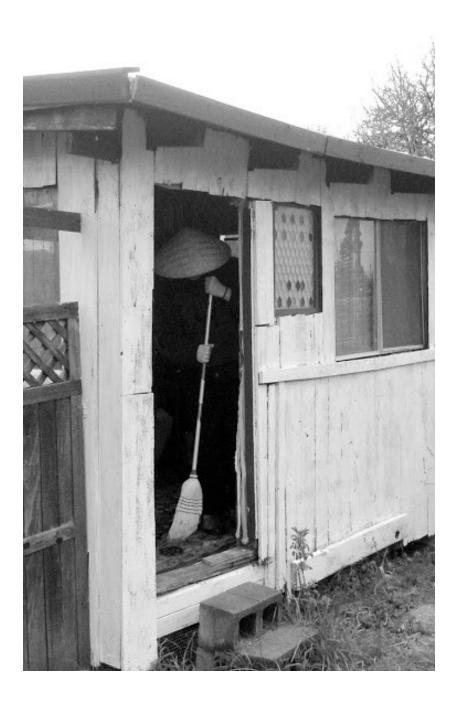


Everything within reach, including the broom: spring cleaning is quickly done in a room eight by ten

When the old woman wants to read a book, she extends her arm; when she wants tea, she extends her arm. Pretentiousness? Contrivance? Of course! But the genuine is never absent; it's up to her to notice.

Progress is not a matter of far or near,

but if you are confused, mountains and rivers block your way.
-- Shitou, "Harmony of Difference and Equality" in *Taishō shinshū* daizōkyō (1924-33) reprinted in Hongzhi, *Cultivating the Empty Field*, 2000, tr. Leighton and Yi Wu



She loves to hear rain on leaves, on grass and stones; when rain falls on desk and books she does roof work

The hut, built from scraps, is approaching the end of its third decade and maintenance is on the increase. She muses that rain and work are both excellent ways to observe the universal as the particular and vice versa.

Not engaging in extensive deliberation, When sowing the fields you must work diligently. -- Dogen, Eihei Koroku 445 (tr. Leighton and Okamura)



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In a snow year, break trail to brew tea and read, or make nine bows as incense drifts toward drafty walls A hat, gloves and coat make a fine robe for morning service.

One who is drinking water knows well enough if it is cold or warm.

-- Huang Po (after Blofeld, tr.)

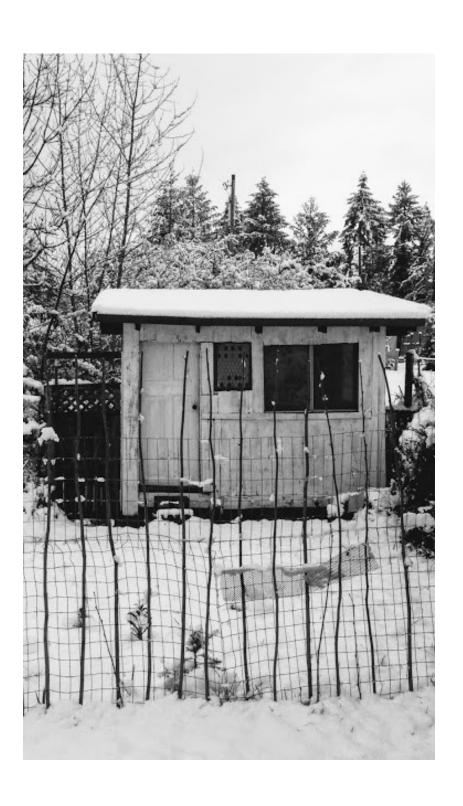


Snow seals heat within; she steams white rice, tea and veg to have with scenes of falling white

The snow helps dampen road noise from nearby civilization. She sits, then gets up to muck about. Before long, thoughts creep in that leave her feeling defeated. "If in sitting one finds no distinctions, where do all these distinctions come from to crowd in as soon as I rise to pour tea?"

Snow besieges my plank door I crowd the stove at night

although this form exists it seems as if it doesn't I have no idea where the months have gone every time I turn around another year on earth is over -- Han-Shan Te-Ching (tr. Red Pine)





the waterfall that runs in winter runs, fills the hut with white noise; to air dark corners, old woman slides her window open

The waterfall's music begins usually in late October or early November and in late May or early June it stops; though in 1993 it ran all year.

So many years spent idly contemplating
The immense white layer on the mountains;
This winter, all of a sudden,
I see it for the first time as a snow-mountain.

-- Dogen (tr. Stephen Heine)



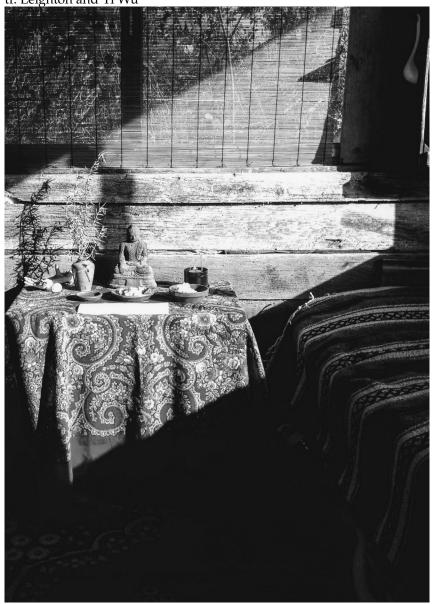
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Sun slants across the room differently each day; sometimes her young friend (who points to the earth) shines but sometimes darkness holds him

Sun strikes the young man on the altar mostly in winter. At the height of summer he reposes in shade. There is no hindrance; light and shade require each other to make one universe.

In darkest night it is perfectly clear; in the light of dawn it is hidden. It is a standard for all things; its use removes all suffering. Although it is not constructed, it is not beyond words.

Like facing a precious mirror; form and reflection behold each other. -- Dongshan, "Song of the Precious Mirror Samadhi" in Taishō shinshū daizōkyō (1924-33) reprinted in Hongzhi, *Cultivating the Empty Field*, 2000, tr. Leighton and Yi Wu



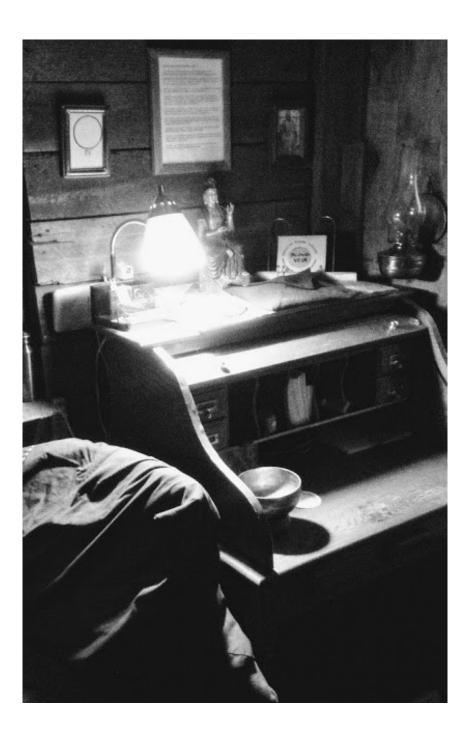
Atop her desk, "one who listens to the cries of the world" rests in emptiness, yet moves to salve inner and outer wounds

A friend donated a statuette of *Avalokiteshvara*, or *Guanyin* (Jp. *Kannon*), the bodhisattva who "hears the cries of the world." It's evidently a mass market copy of the great (2m height) Song Dynasty Guanyin currently on display in the National Museum of China, Beijing. The pose is Royal Ease, and Guanyin appears to be teaching while holding a lotus-flower wish-fulfillment jewel. Above the statuette on the wall there is a framed copy of the Heart Sutra; to the left there is a framed enso or empty circle from one of the series of the "Ten Ox-Herding Pictures (Ox and Ox-Herd Both Gone Out of Sight)." To the right is a framed photograph of

the memorial statue of Mugai Nyodai (1223-1298), first abbess in Japanese Zen, who is said to have *burned her face* with a hot iron in order to be accepted to live and study among monks.

With nothing to attain, a bodhisattva relies on prajnaparamita, and thus the mind is without hindrance. Without hindrance, there is no fear.

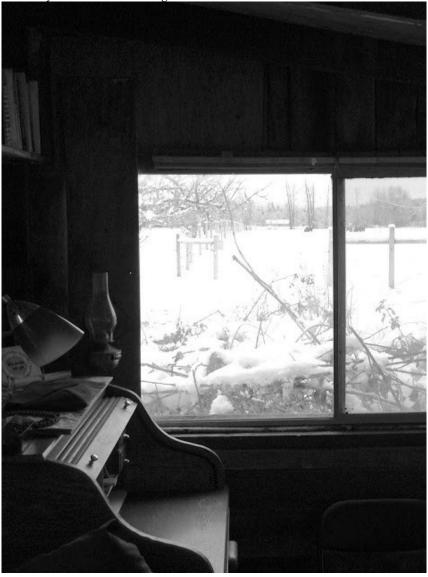
-- Avalokiteshvara in the Heart Sutra.



Bison have moved south across the snow to accept farmers' delivered hay; no geese fly, no starlings chat

The hut's large windows permit close observation of the life cycles of one's plant and animal neighbors. One comes to realize there is no separation.

If we think, "I am here and the mountain is over there," that is a dualistic way of observing things.
--Shunryu Suzuki, Branching Streams Flow in the Darkness 28.



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She stays some nights, by lamplight studying, or in bed, watching the moon stray among bare ash branches I don't let white clouds leave the valley lightly I escort the moon as far as my closed gate Han-shan Te-ch'ing in *The Clouds Should Know Me By Now* 120 (tr. Red Pine)



She has worn a path deep enough to feel her way with feet on glassed grasses: ice on gate awakens her

In frost, the path is reliable, but in rain, its heavy clay slickens. She carries small flat stones, and when her foot slides, she drops one in that spot and tamps it in with her heel: slowly a cobblestone way is established.

All night, a gentle rain fills the darkness outside My long years of hard travel are over at last -- Ryokan in *Great Fool: Zen Master Ryōkan: Poems, Letters, and Other* Writings 140 (Abé and Haskell, tr.)



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Horses and bison tread past her south window at dawn; she pulls back the east shade: how many days without sun?

The few mornings the old woman has awakened at the hut instead of the house have been notable for a certain quiet sublimity, especially in winter, with the small creek roaring nearby. One could say that in the exurbs one can experience something of what Chinese hermits go to remote mountains for, but then, one should be able to practice anywhere without making distinctions, yes?

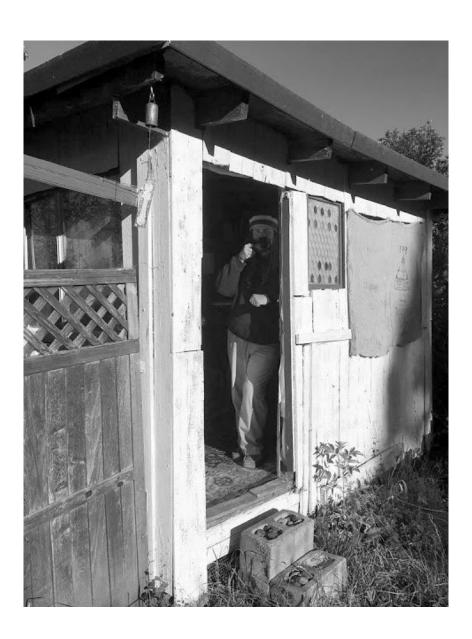
By blue waters, in green hills are places to stroll quietly; near valleys, under trees are places for clearing the mind. Beholding impermanence, do not ignore it, for it encourages the mind to search the Way.

-- Keizan, "Instructions on How to Do Pure Meditation" (tr. Nearman)

Year round, here, she can make yard tea; always something green: fir needles, blackberry leaves, nettles -easier in high summer Hiding from the sun, she drapes a coffee sack over the west window.

Yunyan was boiling some tea. Daowu asked who he was making it for. Yunyan answered, "nobody special."

-- Soto Zen Ancestors in China, Mitchell, 72.

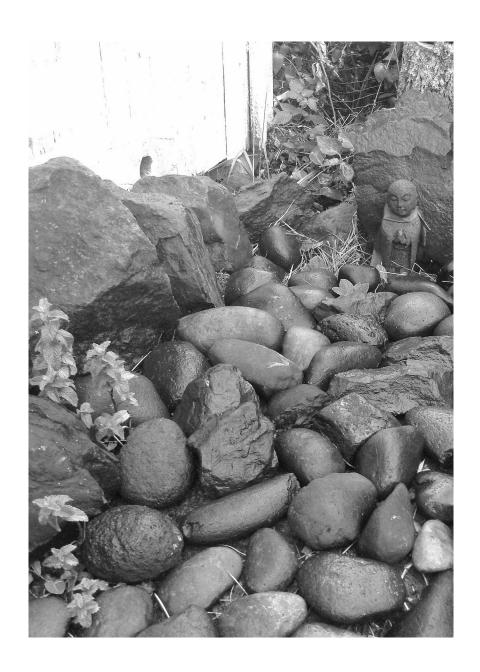


In summer she, grunting, hauls large stones from the dry wash up to the hut to make steps for those who keep to a path Back by the stone bridge, mind returns.
Where now the things that troubled me?
— Han Shan (tr. Red Pine)



Inspired by her stairs, the old woman undertakes to clear more stream bed; instant rock garden Between the stones she has tucked comfrey, mint, and mosses. In drought, she waters the stones, hopefully keeping the "garden" alive till winter.

Plans and events seldom agree
Who can step back doesn't worry
We blossom and fade like flowers
We gather and part like clouds
—Shiwu (Stonehouse, tr. Red Pine)



Plant vegetables; this provides exercise and sharpens observation as well as making food and tea available to you and others

We cultivate ourselves indoors and we cultivate ourselves outdoors, hoe in hand. Kale is a nice bonus.

We empty our minds in the hall for creating buddhas, where some naturally open their flower of awakening in this monastic garden in the hills.
-- Hongzhi, quoted by Dogen in *Eihei Koroku*, 250 (tr. Leighton and

Okamura)



Food and drink, free for the labor, are the proper business of humans; she strives to make gratitude her only possession

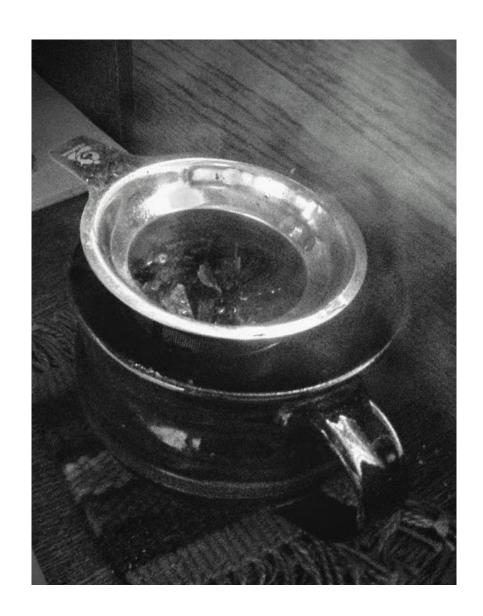
She grows more vegetables than she needs and puts herself in a position to give them away, thus paying her debt of gratitude.

The Buddhist path itself is understood as something that brings gratitude and joy.



In spring, dandelion and nettle tea, in summer, mint and blackberry tea, in fall, chickory and mulberry tea, in winter, fir needle and dried vegetable tea She sees that around her, with the cultivation of a little knowledge, the earth is inclined toward generosity. She reciprocates by treading lightly -- has gardened without chemicals for fifty years, and, to the extent possible for her, used hand tools. She knows this has not dented the world's problems, but when she goes from garden to zazen, seldom feels that nagging sense of something left unaddressed.

Sacred refers to that which helps take us (not only human beings) out of our little selves into the whole mountains-and-rivers mandala universe.
--Gary Snyder, The Practice of the Wild 94



In late summer this work began; in another summer she brings pears and apples to sit and pare while watching the sun go down

It could be objected that the old woman having a retirement income is hypocritical in presenting the half-hermit life as if it were a thing. Her response is that she's suspended by her obligations between the way of

a householder and the way of a hermit. Yet there can be value in reflection wherever one is.

Do not look back on the past, nor anticipate the future, but take whatever is brought forth by the present and endeavor to dispose of it as best you can.
—Hung Ying Ming, Discourses on Vegetable Roots (tr. Isobe)



Fires near and far darken the skies; she ventures, masked, to tend her garden in short stints between cups of bitter switchel

Every year lately, it seems to her, vast swaths of forest and grasslands, tinder-dry, are set alight by lightning, campfires and dragged car mufflers. When young, the old woman was a wildland firefighter. She misses the strength and endurance that made that possible, yet knows it is no longer her time for such things. Seeing the sun at mid-day emulating the moon, she muses that she lives in interesting times, then turns to the things she can still do.

Men brought up in prosperity have animal appetites as ardent as burning fire, and their passion for authority is like an unquenchable blaze. If their cravings and desires are not cooled down by sober and noble ideas, they will be sure to burn themselves up, if not others.

-- Hung Ying-Ming, Discourses on Vegetable Roots (tr. Isobe)



Another autumn fills her eyes with rattling branches reft of leaves: wild geese gather and depart; the creek will find its flow

Clouds will unfold across the landscape, bringing the rains that make life-giving groundwater. It seems there is less groundwater these days; certainly the trees seem stressed. They bud earlier in the spring and dump leaves earlier in the fall. Likewise the old woman keeps to shade more in the summers. What is, is, she reminds herself, regardless of how it happened.

Coming and going,
Without beginning or end,
Like ever changing
White clouds,
The heart of things.

The heart of things.
-- Rengetsu (tr. Stevens) qtd in Zen Women, Schireson, 226



When rain comes doubled, redoubled, the overflowing dry wash moves all things downhill the hut too

Historically, atmospheric conditions have frequently brought large quantities of water from the vicinity of Hawaii to the vicinity of the

homestead in winter. This is known as the "pineapple express." Yet, as with drought, flood seems to be on the increase as well -- planetary mood swings. The old woman, with some effort, holds the hut lightly; she knows it may be destroyed in her lifetime. This is hard for her to watch happening, but it is good training.

Some of the different names of the cause of accumulation of suffering are bondage, false consciousness, pursuit and involvement, attachment to things, conviction, ignorance, grasping, the evil of excess, haste, grasping and clinging, fancy, revolving in circles, confusion, regression, wishing, disharmony.
--Hua-Yen Scripture, Book eight, as outlined in Cleary, Entry into the Inconceivable (1983), Appendix, 182



A warm weather system meets cold air mass: record snow; old woman hunkers down listening to falling trees Getting into the spirit of things, she finds her temporary isolation exhilarating. She has a blanket; she has tea, she can enjoy the view. Later, she will discover the extent of suffering this has brought to the neighborhood. Others are helping to dig one another out; she joins in.

Some of the various names of the truth of the extinction of suffering are tranquillity, absence of inherent nature, extinction, essential reality, emancipation, freedom from greed, goal of goals, what should be seen, detachment from discrimination, constant equanimity, nonfabrication, thoroughly cleared, harmony, independence, extinction of confusion, breaking the seal, no label, nondoing, casting off the heavy burden, stability, freedom from folly.

--Hua-Yen Scripture, book eight, as outlined in Cleary, *Entry into the Inconceivable* (1983), Appendix, 182



Return of summer after long late rains brings heavy growth: smashed blackberries recover, weeds runs riot, old woman's arms give out

One can only drink so much blackberry tea and pile up so much compost. She works not to restore order so much as to avoid drowning in jungle. In the hot afternoons, she means to read, but falls instead into long naps and reveries. Perhaps these are the very "serenity" she had meant to seek.

Among the names of the truth of the path to extinction of suffering are progress toward serenity, bold generalship, transcendence, having skill in means,

 $impartial\ eye,\ detachment\ from\ extremes,\ comprehensive\ understanding,\ and\ contemplating\ the\ four\ truths.$

--Hua-Yen Scripture, book eight, as outlined in Cleary, *Entry into the Inconceivable* (1983), Appendix, 182



A full moon rising looks in on a late sitting; she steps out to greet the full moon rising

The evening is complete without what we have come to call "entertainment." With fewer thoughts ricocheting around in her head, the old woman begins to understand a little of what is said in the phrase, "let be."

I don't regard my life as insufficient. Inside the brushwood gate there is a moon; there are flowers.

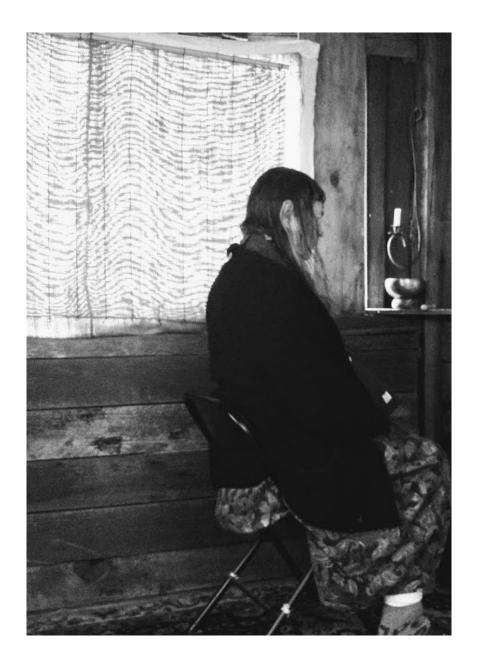
-- Ryokan, in Sky Above, Great Wind 108 (tr. Tanahashi)



When she sits as one point she is the awakened one but just so is the chair, the wall, the fly resting on the wall The mundane is the "holy" and the "holy" is the mundane. Examining this image, the old woman chuckles. At seventy, she is channeling Whistler's mother.

Why leave behind the seat that exists in your home and go aimlessly off to the dusty realms of other lands? If you make one misstep you go astray from the way directly before you.

-- Dogen, "Fukanzazengi."



This robe will be stitched with her mother's thread her mother-in-law's needle her shaking hands

She sews at high noon. Thankfully, the hut's large windows admit enough light, augmented with two bright lamps, for these old eyes. Two hours in a day is enough; go play.

The reality of life settles down into the reality of life.
-- Kosho Uchiyama in *The Wholehearted Way* 164 (tr. Okumura and Leighton)



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From the eaves a small bell sounds out mountain winds; the old woman wonders who is this listening In this location, warming air in summer flows south and cooling air flows north. Such reliability!

White clouds too know the flavor

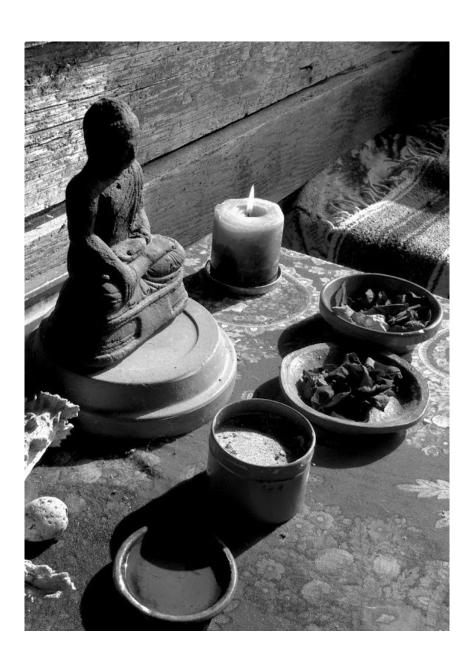
Of this mountain life; They haven't waited for the Vesper Bell To come on home again. -- Ching An in The Clouds Should Know Me By Now 188 (tr. Seaton)



In August the altar is thirsty; she tells herself be on the lookout for a deeper water dish The rate of evaporation of the water offering bespeaks, for her, here, a newly parched landscape. She reminds herself to set out water for birds and animals, and to prepare for fires and smoke. Life as she has known it is coming to an end; new habits will be the correct response in the near term; what will be required in the long term? Greed, hatred and delusion will bear their fruit; what fruit might she grow to counter them?

Anger and hatred are the feelings that arise towards those who stand in the way of your greed and craving, who prevent you from achieving what you believe to be your due. And delusion is the consciousness that shapes itself around the feelings of desire or revulsion to justify your attachment to the outcome you want to materialize, that validate your slant on the phenomenal world as "right."

-- Ross McLauren Madden, *The Three Poisons: A Buddhist Guide to Resolving Conflict* 99 (emphasis added)



To and from this hut daily she has walked, leaning on her old apple stick, learning a way to live

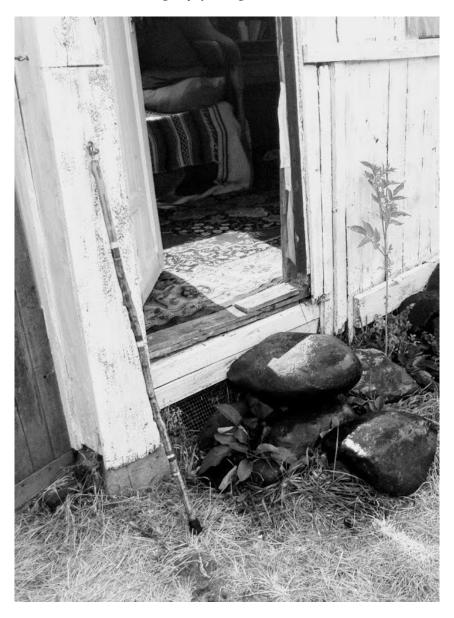
To counter greed, hatred and delusion, she has read, one must learn non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion.

Okay; where to begin? In this hut she has realized that she can live relatively free of greed, by keeping it simple -- not needing much. She can live relatively free of hatred, by keeping it simple -- no ambition (for one hates those who prevent or delay the attainment of one's ambitions). She can live relatively free of delusion, by keeping it simple (observation without judgment clouded by greed or hatred).

And nothing is simpler than to sit, walk, eat, and rest without judging, yes?

To be aware of the observer, his movement, his self-centered activity, his assertions, his prejudices, one must be aware of all these unconscious movements which build the separatist feeling that he is different. It must be observed without any form of evaluation, without like and dislike; just observe

it in daily life, in its relationships. When this observation is clear, isn't there then a freedom from the observer?
-- J. Krishnamurti, The Urgency of Change 138



One day, the literary giant Bai Juyi paid a visit to Chan Master Niaoke Daolin. He saw the Chan Master sitting upright by a magpie's nest, so he said, "Chan Master, living in a tree is too dangerous!"

The Chan Master replied, "Magistrate, it is your situation that is extremely dangerous!"

Bai Juyi heard this and, taking exception, said, "I am an important official in this imperial court. What danger is there?"

The Chan Master said, "The torch is handed from one to another, people follow their own inclinations without end. How can you say it's not dangerous?" The meaning is to say that in officialdom, there are rises and falls, and people scheming against one another. Danger is right before your eyes. Bai Juyi seemed to come to some sort of understanding. Changing the subject, he then asked, "What is the essential teaching of the Dharma?"

The Chan Master replied, "Commit no evil. Do good deeds!" Hearing this, Bai Juyi thought the Chan Master would instruct him with some profound concept. Yet, they were just ordinary words. Feeling very disappointed, he said, "Even a three-year-old child knows this concept!"

The Chan Master said, "Although a three-year-old child can say it, an eighty-year-old man cannot do it."

-- Hsing Yun (tr. Pey-Rong Lee and Dana Dunlap)

Practice

is whatever one does repeatedly with an intention, such as to form a habit. In the case of this old woman, she sits zazen, walks kinhin, or does chores with awareness of the present scene — internal, external — to the extent possible for her.

As I would now explain it, diligently practicing the Way means letting all things be what they are in their Self-nature, as you put your essential oneness into operation by following the road away from discriminatory and dualistic thinking. When you have abandoned that type of thinking and have thus passed beyond its barriers, you will cease to be affected by its explanations, which, like the nodes in bamboo, block free passage...."

— Dogen, "Bendowa" (tr. Nearman)

She currently makes no claim for the efficacy of this method, other than to note that to practice non-judgment in retreat calms her mind and body and seems to improve her chances, when she returns to the contentious world, of doing what she senses is right. If she were asked right now to encapsulate in a quatrain the little she has learned, it is to say to herself:

Give freely, speak kindly, embody benevolence, and make between your need and that of others no distinction

